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GMUG Announces Change in Crested Butte Camping Management

Gunnison, Colorado, August 19, 2019 – In the fall of 2019, the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests will begin changing its camping management strategy in the Crested Butte area by shifting to a designated camping system in the following drainages: Kebler Pass, Lake Irwin, Splains Gulch, Slate River, Washington Gulch, Upper East River, Brush Creek and Cement Creek.

In recent years the rising popularity of dispersed camping on National Forest System lands surrounding Crested Butte has led to a marked increase in undesirable impacts. Rising levels of E. Coli in streams, creation of unauthorized routes, social conflicts due to congestion and issues involving trespassing on neighboring private lands are all indications that a management change is needed.

“The combination of significant year-over-year increases in visitation as well as new technology that allows campers to push deeper and persist longer in the backcountry has created a situation that under our current management strategy is not sustainable,” said Gunnison District Ranger Matt McCombs. “Add in that there are currently different regulations in each of these drainages making education, enforcement and visitor compliance difficult, it’s time for a shift to a more direct management approach.” McCombs continued, “our goal is to maximize recreation opportunities while minimizing unwanted impacts moving us to a sustainable path going forward.”

The move to designated camping will require people to stay only in pre-established sites in the affected drainages. These campsites will be primarily located in the hardened areas that already exist, unsustainable sites and those established too close to water will be decommissioned. This strategy will mirror other public lands that require camping in designated sites with the best example locally being the BLM managed Hartman Rocks.

The Gunnison Ranger District is seeking informal feedback on this proposal and is engaging local communities directly to discuss potential impacts or concerns. The public is encouraged to visit the project website where further details of the proposal and an opportunity to provide feedback can be found. That site is: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=56454>.

Full implementation of the project is expected to begin in 2020 and ongoing through 2021. The proposal would be implemented as an action that is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or an Environmental Analysis as prescribed in Chapter 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations: 36 CFR 220.6(d)(5), 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1), 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6), and 36 CFR 220.6(e)(20).

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For further information or questions, please contact Gunnison Ranger District at (970) 641-0471.

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The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre & Gunnison National Forests manage approximately 3 million acres of land in Southwest Colorado within Delta, Garfield, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Mesa, Montrose, Ouray, Saguache, San Juan and San Miguel counties.

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